

A Linguistic Study of Russian-Derived Jargon in Billiards Discourse in Persian



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ABSTRACT

The present article explores the linguistic processes underlying the adoption and stabilization of several Russian loanwords in the informal speech of billiards players in Iran. These words, which have primarily spread as jargon among players, exemplify lexical borrowing within a specialized colloquial domain. This research, utilizing lexical analysis and data collected from natural spoken discourse, online resources, and field observations, examines the structural and semantic characteristics of terms such as *odar*, *pitok*, *serdi/serdani*, and *vogel*. Some of the investigated terms (such as *billiard*, *shar*, and *italianski*) have transitioned from jargon into formal language through their inclusion in official texts and dictionaries. The findings indicate that Persian billiards jargon—particularly as influenced by contact with Russian—constitutes a dynamic and structured linguistic subset, highlighting the role of active lexical borrowing and social identity in contemporary Persian.

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Introduction

Language is a dynamic phenomenon, constantly evolving in response to cultural and social interactions. One prominent manifestation of this dynamism is the incorporation of loanwords from other languages, which may penetrate specific registers of language in the form of specialized jargon. Focusing on the jargon of billiards in Iran, this article examines the impact of Russian lexical items within this particular discourse.

In the contemporary era, especially since the late nineteenth century, Persian has borrowed numerous words from Russian. According to the Dictionary of Russian Loanwords in Persian (Rezapour & Abdollahi, 2021b), commonly known as the Arash Dictionary, more than 250 Russian words have been identified in modern Persian, some of which are used in colloquial and informal speech as well.

Billiards, as a sport with transnational roots, has also served as a vehicle for the borrowing of Russian vocabulary into spoken Persian. In this study, four key Russian-derived words that have become jargon in the colloquial discourse of billiards in Iran—*Odar*, *Pitok*, *serdani*, and *vogel*—are analyzed as case studies. This analysis includes an examination of their process of entry, semantic shifts, phonological adaptation, and functional roles in contemporary Persian.

The significance of this research lies in its focus on live, field-based evidence rather than solely on historical data. In fact, these jargons are still in the process of

stabilization and transformation, offering a rare opportunity to observe the lexical borrowing process in Persian as it unfolds. Utilizing spoken data, online sources, and linguistic analysis, this study seeks to address questions regarding the origin, process of entry, and syntactic and semantic developments of these terms.

Literature Review

Numerous linguistic studies have examined Russian loanwords in the Persian language. An interesting early example is the lecture of the late Zaka al-Molk, in which he addressed the presence of Arabic, Turkish, French, English, and Russian words in Persian. He stated: "A language does not become impoverished by borrowing foreign words; on the contrary, if such borrowings are made judiciously and out of necessity, our language becomes even richer." (Forūghī, 2006)

Subsequent research, such as the articles by Dr. Sadeqi (Şādiqī, 2006), Golkar (Golkār, 2011), Abdoltajedini (Abd-al-Tājidīnī, 2013), and SeyedAghaei Rezaei, who has two relevant publications (Seyyed-Āqā'ī-Rezā'ī, 2010), (Seyyed-Āqā'ī-Rezā'ī, 2014), demonstrates that the influence of Russian on Persian, particularly from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, has been significant, resulting in the incorporation of more than 250 Russian words into Persian. These loanwords are not confined to written language; they have also found their way into local dialects and everyday spoken discourse.

Furthermore, the Arash Dictionary (Rezapour & Abdollahi, 2021a), one of the most comprehensive sources in this field, identifies and analyzes nearly 300 Russian words in Persian. However, to date, no study has specifically addressed Russian-derived jargon in the Persian billiards discourse. The unique feature of the present research is its focus not on the historical analysis of well-established terms, but rather on the live and simultaneous examination of the emergence, spread, and stabilization of a set of newly borrowed words.

This study constitutes the first systematic attempt to document and linguistically analyze this phenomenon in the context of billiards, offering a map of lexical developments within this specific domain.

The simultaneous investigation of the genesis, dynamics, and stabilization of jargons such as *Odar*, *pitok*, *serdani*, and *vogel*, in the spoken language of billiards players provides linguists with a rare opportunity to observe and analyze one of the active pathways of word formation and borrowing in contemporary Persian. Additionally, this research contributes to a better understanding of the linguistic needs of specialized fields and the impact of language contact in informal settings.

Methodology

This section reviews key theoretical concepts and linguistic data collected.

On Loanwords:

In linguistics, a "loanword" refers to a word that has entered the recipient language

from another language or dialect and has been integrated into it (Azīz-Moḥammadī, 2003). This process is part of the broader phenomenon of language borrowing, which may affect lexical, syntactic, or morphological domains. In Persian, the term "loanword" (*vām-vājah*) itself is a relatively recent coinage, having gained prominence in recent decades with the expansion of linguistic research and the influence of Western linguistic literature. The use of this term is not observed in relatively older reference works, such as the *Dehkhoda* (Dehḡodā, n.d.) Dictionary, which may indicate its novelty within Persian scientific discourse.

There are various perspectives among linguists regarding the phenomenon of borrowing. Some consider it a sign of linguistic vitality and adaptability, while others view the influx of foreign words with a more critical eye (Yel-Šarzeh, 2021). Nevertheless, the historical experience of the Persian language demonstrates ongoing interaction with other languages, during which imported words are adapted, stabilized, or sometimes abandoned to suit the expressive needs and internal structure of Persian.

This study focuses on a particular group of loanwords that have entered the specialized discourse of billiards in Persian as a result of contact with Russian. These examples provide an opportunity for a detailed analysis of how such linguistic elements are introduced, stabilized, and adapted to the structure and function of Persian.

A Brief Note on Linguistic Data and the Collection of Billiards Jargon

Given that the lexical items under investigation in this article are predominantly used in the colloquial speech of billiards players in Iran and are not recorded in formal academic sources, the data for this study were collected through fieldwork involving observation, listening, and linguistic documentation. Over several years, the researcher attended billiards venues in Tehran and a few other cities, gathering a set of common terms and expressions. These words were observed and documented during everyday interactions among players, in the course of games, training sessions, and even informal conversations.

To enhance the accuracy and breadth of the data, online searches were also employed. The content of websites selling billiards equipment, educational channels, player forums, and posts on billiards-related social media platforms provided additional information. Furthermore, to assess the prevalence of certain terms, Google searches (in Persian) were conducted, and the number of relevant results for each word is presented as linguistic evidence.

The data obtained in this study represent a living example of an evolving language within a specialized yet informal context, which typically remains outside the scope of official linguistic resources. This article is among the first attempts to document and scientifically analyze this jargon, with part

of its objective being to provide an initial framework for examining the structure, meaning, and origin of these terms.

Linguistic Analysis of Billiards Jargon

According to some accounts, the game of billiards was introduced to Iran in the mid-twentieth century by Russian and British forces and initially gained popularity in exclusive, limited circles. The arrival of the game was accompanied by a set of technical terms, most of which entered Persian from Russian. These terms, especially after the game's popularization in recent decades, have become established among Persian-speaking players as specialized jargon.

At the outset of this study, the question arose as to whether the words associated with billiards should be classified as technical terminology or as jargon. Based on widely accepted criteria in sociolinguistics and lexical studies, it became clear that these words, due to characteristics such as their restriction to a specific group (billiards players), predominance in spoken rather than written usage, lack of codification in official language resources, and their role in fostering in-group identity, should clearly be regarded as jargon rather than as formal technical terms.

Since jargons typically emerge within particular social, professional, or cultural contexts, the billiards-related words discussed here represent emergent jargon connected to the relatively recent phenomenon of billiards in Iran, forming

within a specific sphere of social interaction. Historically, the introduction of billiards to Iran dates back roughly a century, with its broader public diffusion becoming evident particularly after the 2000s, coinciding with the official recognition of the Bowling and Billiards Federation. In this context, specialized vocabulary associated with the game entered Persian and, over time, became stabilized in the speech of enthusiasts.

Before undertaking a case analysis of the most common billiards jargons, it should be noted that some words associated with the game, while initially limited and group-specific, have gradually extended beyond jargon status to be included in formal texts, dictionaries, or general language.

Among these are *billiard*, which now appears in most official and general Persian sources and whose meaning is widely recognized by Persian speakers. The word *italianski*, although of Russian origin and still somewhat colloquial, is also found in some instructional materials related to billiards. *Shar*, as the equivalent of the word *ball*, is now widely used, including in more formal texts. The word *piramid*, referring to a specific variant of billiards, occasionally appears in specialized written sources as well.

These examples illustrate how foreign vocabulary in Persian can evolve from jargon to an accepted loanword, moving along a path from specialized, group-specific usage toward broader integration. Since the focus of this research is on active and still-stabilizing jargons,

these words will not be analyzed as case studies in the following sections; however, tracing their development may serve as the basis for future research.

In the following, the structure, original meaning, possible semantic changes, and current status of selected examples of billiards jargon will be analyzed.

Analysis and Discussion of Billiards Jargon:

Case Study—The Word *Odar* /ʔu:ˈdɒ:r/ (“billiards cue”)

1. Etymology and Linguistic Origin

• The original word in Russian: *yɔap*

• **Russian meaning:** strike, blow, impact, hit on the ball (*yɔap no мячу*)

• **Historical roots:** This word is derived from Old Russian and Islamic languages, with connections to Indo-European roots.

• **Type of word:** A word of Russian origin, not itself a loanword in Russian.

2. Phonological Analysis

• **Russian pronunciation:** [ɔˈdar]

• **Phonological adaptation:** The word has become fully adapted to Persian phonology. The initial sound [ɔ] has shifted to [oo], as is common in colloquial Persian.

• **Stress change:** In Russian, the stress is on the second syllable (*dar*), and this stress placement is preserved in Persian.

3. Phonetic and Borrowing Analysis

• **Type of borrowing:** Direct, likely oral, and transferred through

intercultural (athletic) contact between Persian and Russian speakers.

- **Phonetic changes:** Minor, but natural, adjustments occurred during the process of Persianization; these are not particularly drastic.

- **Colloquial pronunciation:** Some users also employ variants like *odal* or *odal*, reflecting regional diversity and oral evolution.

4. Morphological and Syntactic Analysis

- **Inflection:** The word can be inflected in Persian (e.g., *Odarha*¹ for cues, *Odar-e bolandtar*² for longer cue, *Odar-e shekasteh*³ for broken cue).

- **Combination with Persian suffixes:** No documented cases were found, but such derivation is possible in practice (e.g., *Odari*⁴).

- **Grammatical role:** Noun (instrument), as opposed to Russian where it is a verbal noun. This shift illustrates semantic change from verbal noun to concrete noun (tool) in Persian.

5. Semantic Analysis

- **Semantic shift:** A clear semantic change has taken place. In Russian, the word means "*strike*", but in Persian it refers to the "*tool for striking*" ("*billiards cue*" or "*cue stick*").

- **Cultural connotation:** The word has acquired cultural associations within the Iranian billiards community, evolving into a distinctive jargon term.

- **Specialized or general use:** Its use is specialized and limited to a specific community (players, enthusiasts, and sellers of billiards equipment).

6. Sociolinguistic Analysis

- **Users:** Billiards players, fans of the sport, and specialty sports equipment vendors.

- **Social context:** The use of this jargon serves to foster a sense of group membership and to distinguish insiders from outsiders, enhancing group cohesion and identity.

- **Linguistic register:** Informal speech and in-group communication; it has not yet entered formal or mainstream media.

- **Reasons for Adoption into Persian**

- Substitution for a more professional and specialized term (instead of "billiards cue").

- The desire to create group solidarity among billiards enthusiasts.

- The influence of the Russian language in sporting environments, especially in Central Asia and the Caucasus where Iranians have contact, as well as direct interactions with Russian speakers.

In summary, *Odar* is derived from a verbal noun meaning "strike" and has entered Persian through billiards jargon, where it is used to denote the instrument for striking (the cue). The word has undergone both semantic change and adaptation to

¹ اودارها

² اودار بلندتر

³ اودار شکسته

⁴ اوداری

Persian phonological and syntactic structure.

(Forūshgāh-e Bilyārd va Snūker 'Lārīsā', 2025)

Analysis of the Word *Pitok* /pi'tok/

1. Etymology and Linguistic Origin

- **Original word in Russian:** *бумок*, [bʊɪ'tok]

- **Russian meaning:** In billiards terminology, the main ball that is struck—typically the white ball, although in styles such as “free pyramid” it may be of various colors.

- **History and origin:** A native Russian word, derived from *бум* (“to hit/strike”) + the suffix *-ок*, used to denote an object or tool related to an action.

- **Word type:** An originally Russian word, not a loanword in Russian. Although it has other meanings, only the billiards-specific sense is considered here.

2. Phonological Analysis

- **Russian pronunciation:** [bʊɪ'tok] ; **Persian pronunciation:** [pi'tok]

- **Phonological adaptation:** The initial Russian /b/ has shifted to /p/, which is more compatible with Persian phonology; such a change is common in lexical borrowing. The sound /ɪ/ has also become /i/ in Persian.

- **Stress shift:** The stress is on the second syllable (“tok”) in both Russian and Persian.

3. Phonetic and Borrowing Analysis

- **Type of borrowing:** Direct, oral, and through cultural interaction.

- **Phonetic changes:** The /b/ to /p/ shift and the simplification of /ɪ/ to /i/; no unfamiliar phonemes remain for Persian speakers, and the word is fully nativized phonetically.

- **Colloquial pronunciation:** The form *pitok* is used colloquially, and no other variants are attested.

4. Morphological and Syntactic Analysis

- **Inflection:** The word is inflected in Persian (e.g., *pitok dadan*⁵ for “to perform a *pitok*,” noun compounds such as *ertekāb-e pitok*⁶ meaning “to commit a *pitok*”).

- **Combination with Persian suffixes:** No documented cases, but such derivation is possible.

- **Grammatical function:** Instrumental noun and also used for actions (in idiomatic expressions). It refers both to the cue ball and, metonymically, to the act of committing a foul.

5. Semantic Analysis

- **Semantic shift:** In Russian, it denotes the cue ball, but in Persian it has acquired a secondary meaning—“a foul in the game.” This semantic extension arises from the situational use of the word during play.

- **Cultural connotation:** The word has become a cultural jargon of billiards, carrying specialized in-group meaning.

⁵ پیتوک دادن

⁶ ارتکاب پیتوک

- **Specialized or general use:** Its use is specialized and not found in general speech or formal texts.

6. Sociolinguistic Analysis

- With regard to users, social context, and linguistic register, the situation is entirely similar to that of *Odar*.

7. Reasons for Adoption into Persian

- The motivations and context are broadly similar to those for *odar*, sharing the same origins and sociolinguistic conditions.

Pitok has emerged in Persian with two distinct roles: as the name for an instrument (*cue ball*) and as an action (*to commit a foul*). The word has been accepted phonologically and morphologically in Persian, and it has acquired new meaning and social significance within the billiards community.

(Tehrān Bilyārd, n.d.)

Analysis of the Word *Vugel* /vu:gl/

1. Etymology and Linguistic Origin

- **Original expression in Russian:** *в угол* (noun with preposition)

- **Russian meaning:** “to the corner”, “in the corner”; an imperative phrase in billiards referring to directing the ball toward one of the corner pockets.

- **Historical roots:** The word *угол* (*ugol*) alone means corner, angle, or nook. It is a native Russian word, not a loanword. The preposition *в* means “to” or “in” and is used for directional constructions in Russian grammar.

- **Word type:** A common syntactic combination in Russian, not a standalone noun or set phrase in written sources—primarily oral and colloquial.

2. Phonological Analysis

- **Russian pronunciation:** [vɔˈɡol] ; Persian pronunciation: [vu:gl], sometimes [vo:ɡel]

- **Phonological adaptation:** The initial /v/ is rendered as /v/ or /v/ in Persian, typically as “ج”, the standard equivalent in Persian loanwords. The vowel /ɔ/ has shifted to /u:/ to fit Persian syllable structure.

- **Stress shift:** In Russian, the stress is on the second syllable, while in Persian it shifts to the first syllable, with *vugel* most often pronounced with initial stress.

- **Segmental adaptation:** Final consonants like /l/ are retained. The shift from /v/ to “ج” and the omission of the schwa are common in Persian adaptation.

3. Phonetic and Borrowing Analysis

- **Type of borrowing:** Direct, oral, and through cultural-sporting contact (billiards), not mediated by media or written sources.

- **Phonetic changes:** Simplification and adaptation to Persian phonology. The preposition (*в*) is dropped syntactically but is preserved in pronunciation as “ج”.

- **Colloquial pronunciation:** The form *vugel* is the stabilized usage, with occasional variants such as *vogol*.

4. Morphological and Syntactic Analysis

- **Inflection:** The word is not inflected in Persian, as it functions mainly as a locative noun or spatial reference in billiards, rather than as an instrument or action.

- **Combination with Persian suffixes:** Not documented, though theoretically possible with a suffix like “ی”.

- **Grammatical role:** Locative noun within jargon; denotes a specific area of the table.

5. Semantic Analysis

- **Semantic shift:** In Russian, the phrase refers to moving or placing a ball “in the corner”, but in Persian, this meaning is fixed and now denotes the actual corner pockets of the billiards table—a shift from a verbal phrase to a fixed locative noun.

- **Cultural connotation:** Used as a technical term to describe specific points on the billiards table, and has become essential to understanding the game among Persian-speaking players and coaches.

- **Usage:** Specialized; used in billiards settings and player/coach interactions.

6. Sociolinguistic Analysis

- In terms of users, social context, and register, the situation is essentially the same as with the previous words.

7. Reasons for Adoption into Persian

- The motivations and context are generally the same as with previous

terms, with parallel origins and sociolinguistic factors.

Vugel, of Russian origin, has shifted from a directional phrase to a locative noun in Persian. It has undergone changes in pronunciation, meaning, and grammatical function, and now serves as a marker of group identity within billiards discourse.

(Āmūzeshgāh-e 118 Fāyl, n.d.)

Analysis of the Words *seridi* (/se'ridi/) and *serdi* (/ 'serdi/)

1. Etymology and Linguistic Origin

- **Original Russian expression:** *средний* (*v sredniy*), (adjective with preposition)

- **Root:** From *середь* / *середина* (“middle”, “center”), a word of Slavic origin.

- **Persian usage:** سریدی or سردی refers to the side middle pockets on a billiards table.

2. Phonological and Phonetic Adaptation

- **Phonological adaptation to Persian:** As with *vugel*, the Russian pronunciation is simplified. The // sounds and consonant clusters in Russian are softened or eliminated. /sr'ɪdɪnɪj/ becomes /serdi/ in Persian.

- **Syllable stress:** The stress in Persian falls on the first syllable (*serdi*), whereas in Russian it is on the final syllable.

- **Segmental adaptation:** The difficult Russian cluster /ɲ/ is dropped and replaced with a simpler Persian structure.

3. Semantic Analysis and Shift

- **Russian meaning:** Refers to the movement of the ball toward the center pocket.

- **Persian meaning:** Refers directly to the center (side) pocket itself—not to an action or direction (a semantic shift similar to that of the jargon *vugel*).

- **Grammatical shift:** From a locative adverb or adjective in Russian to a locative noun in Persian.

4. Morphological and Syntactic Structure

- **Inflection:** Like *vugel*, in Persian it is used as an indeclinable, specific noun.

- **Combination with Persian suffixes:** Not documented.

- **Morphological change:** The preposition (*e*) is dropped and the adjective is nominalized.

5. Sociolinguistic Aspects

- **Users:** Players, coaches, and vendors of billiards equipment.

- **Register:** Informal, specialized speech.

- **Cultural function:** Functions as specialized jargon, marking identity among those involved in billiards.

- **Reasons for adoption:** Similar to *vugel* and other terms in this group—need for precise technical terminology in gameplay, cultural distinction, and linguistic interaction with Russian- or Caucasian-speaking players.

Serdi or *seridi*, like *vugel*, exemplifies an unofficial, specialized loanword that entered Persian through the oral exchanges of Persian-speaking billiards players with

Russian- or Central Asian-speaking counterparts. In both cases, the semantic shift from denoting movement or direction to designating a specific location has occurred, and the phonological structure has been adapted to Persian norms.

(Sāyt-e Novin Billiard Website, n.d.)

Conclusion

This study, focusing on Russian-derived jargon within the colloquial discourse of billiards in Iran, demonstrated that the process of linguistic borrowing is not confined to written language or formal vocabulary, but also occurs vigorously and dynamically within informal, specialized, and group-specific contexts. Words such as *odar*, *pitok*, *serdi/seridi*, and *vugel* are not only emblematic of linguistic interaction between Persian and Russian speakers in settings like billiards, but also clearly illustrate processes such as phonological adaptation, the elimination of foreign syntactic elements, and the creation of new meanings within a fresh cultural context. Each of these jargon terms displays a form of linguistic re-creation: Russian words, having passed through Persian phonological and semantic filters, have become effective tools of communication within the billiards community. Phonological adaptation, the removal of Russian prefixes and suffixes, and the simplification of syntactic structures are evidence of these words' internalization into the Persian linguistic system. Nevertheless, while their specialized meanings are largely preserved, their cultural connotations have been redefined

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